

AQUATIC FARMING

Goals

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Provide opportunities to increase income and diversify the state's economy through the use of state tidelands and submerged lands for aquatic farming.

OPTIMUM USE OF AREAS

Provide for the optimum use of the most suitable aquatic farming areas.

Guidelines

BACKGROUND

Currently, the department cannot authorize finfish operations under state law. However, the aquatic farming industry has indicated that Prince of Wales Island may be a prime area for finfish farming. Without legislative direction and sufficient data, this plan is unable to adequately address the siting and cumulative impacts from finfish aquatic farming facilities. Should the legislature legalize finfish, the department will adopt policy prior to authorizing finfish aquatic farming operations. The policy will address siting guidelines to protect habitat areas, harvest activities, and other land uses; development standards, development bonds; and other subjects as necessary.

Shellfish and sea vegetable aquatic farming is currently legal, and the department must adjudicate applications for that use. The guidelines below apply to shellfish and sea vegetable aquatic farming. The department expects that aquatic farming guidelines will continue to evolve over the next few years as the state gains experience and data, the legislature gives further direction, and the various working groups complete their studies. Therefore, the guidelines below are somewhat general. Authorizations for aquatic farming will be consistent with the more detailed policies, as they are determined. These more detailed policies will be added to this chapter during periodic reviews of the plan. Finally, all DNR authorizations for aquatic farming must meet the management intent and guidelines of this plan.

A. AQUATIC FARMING & COMPETING USES

Aquatic farming may be allowed on state tidelands or submerged lands where there is no significant conflict. The siting of aquatic farming facilities may be more difficult on tidelands designated for log transfer or storage (F), mineral transfer (M) or access (m), crucial fish and wildlife habitat (Ha), intensive harvest areas, adjacent to existing or proposed land sales; or anchorages or developed recreation (R). These areas will be available for aquatic farming if the land manager determines that (a) it is possible to site, design, and operate the two or more uses compatibly in the area, or (b) there is no

¹ In Vol. I, POWAP, intensive harvest areas are referenced on the maps in Chapter 3. In Vol. II, SWPOW, they are referenced in the text.

feasible and prudent alternative for aquatic farming while one exists for the competing use. In no case will aquatic farming be allowed to foreclose access to mineral, timber, important fish and wildlife, or recreation resources unless feasible or prudent alternative access exists. However, in some cases it may be in the public interest to concentrate uses in one bay, (i.e., shellfish rafts and timber transfer) rather than allowing the proliferation of uses in many bays.

B. SEPARATION BETWEEN FACILITIES

The siting and spacing of aquatic farming operations should minimize the risk of disease transmission, competition with wild stocks of fish and shellfish, and water quality degradation through separation between operators. Permit holders that may be affected by a proposed operation should be notified and given an opportunity to comment.

C. UPLAND OWNER SUPPORT FOR AQUATIC FARMING OBJECTIVES

Upland owners are encouraged to identify areas where aquatic farming (including upland facilities) should and should not be developed and to communicate their conclusions to the department and to the aquatic farming industry.

D. AQUATIC FARMING CARETAKER FACILITIES

Floating caretaker facilities for aquatic farming operations are allowed in areas where there is no feasible and prudent upland alternative and no significant competing use. Floating caretaker facilities for aquatic farming operations will not be allowed in designated recreation (R, Ra, Ru, Rd, r), important community harvest areas², or intensive sport or commercial fishing areas² unless the regional manager determines that there is no feasible or prudent alternative. The determination will be made available for public comment.

E. SITING NEAR ANADROMOUS FISH STREAMS

Aquatic farming facilities will not be sited within 300 feet of the mouth at mean lower low water of an anadromous fish stream without the approval of ADF&G.

F. SITING IN CERTAIN HABITATS

Aquatic farming facilities will not be sited on or within 300 feet of extensive kelp or eelgrass beds; seaweed harvest areas; or shellfish concentration areas (as identified in the ADF&G Alaska Habitat Management Guides or determined by ADF&G) unless the manager determines after consultation with ADF&G that there is no feasible and prudent alternative.

G. SITING NEAR MARINE MAMMALS & BIRDS

An aquatic farming facility should not be sited where its operation will cause significant impact to marine mammals; waterfowl or birds; or where it is anticipated that the aquatic farming operation will be subject to significant predation. These areas are identified in the ADF&G Habitat Management Guides or will be identified by ADF&G during agency review of an application to use state tidelands.

If an aquatic farming facility is to be sited in an area where there is potential for disturbance or predation, the land manager will, in consultation with ADF&G, determine measures necessary to buffer the wild species from significant disturbance and minimize predation of the cultured species.

² In Vol. I, POWAP, intensive community, sport, and commercial harvest areas are referenced on the maps in Chapter 3. In Vol. II, SWPOW, they are referenced in the text.

H. AQUATIC FARMING NEAR SETTLEMENT AREAS

Aquatic farming adjacent to state land designated for settlement should not preclude or significantly impact the potential for future settlement. However, state land may be used for support facilities if consistent with the management intent and guidelines of the plan. For example, state land could be used if any increased requirements for sewage treatment for existing or proposed settlement on state land near an oyster farm could be borne by the aquatic farming operation.

I. DEVELOPMENT PLANS

A development plan will be required before a lease or permit for aquatic farming facilities is approved. The preferred approach is for the application and development plan requirements to serve (at the minimum) as the basis for DNR, ADF&G, DEC, ACMP, and upland owner review. The development plan will be consistent with applicable policy established through interagency working groups on aquatic farming. Consistent with AS 38.05.083, a performance bond or other security will be required to cover the costs to the department of restoring the leased site in the event the lessee abandons it.

J. PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

The regional manager will attach reasonable performance standards to the permit or lease for project development and operation. The performance standards are to ensure that the permitted area is used for the approved activity, the proposal is economically viable, and the permit is not held for speculation or removal of a land base from competition. If the performance standards and development plan are not met, the permit or lease may be cancelled.

K. PREFERRED STORAGE SITE

Gravel and sand beaches are generally the preferred sites for onshore storage of shellfish awaiting test results and shipment, because these sites are less biologically productive than salt marshes and tideflats.

L. DISPERSION OF ORGANIC DEPOSITS

Aquatic farming facilities should be sited where currents are strong enough to disperse organic deposits and in areas with the least productive benthic habitats. Siting in small embayments with sills, natural restrictions to tidal exchange, or existing water quality problems should be avoided.

M. OTHER GUIDELINES AFFECTING AQUATIC FARMING

Other guidelines will affect aquatic farming management practices. See in particular the following sections of this chapter.

- Coordination and Public Notice
- Fish and Wildlife Habitat and Harvest Areas
- Public and Private Access
- Recreation, Tourism, and Scenic Resources
- Shorelines and Stream Corridors
- Transportation and Utilities

